Academic Internship Standards

STANDARD ONE: Mission and Goals

The primary program mission is to engage students in planned, educationally-related work and learning experiences that integrate knowledge and theory with practical application and skill development in a professional setting to enhance the overall educational experience. The program's mission clearly defines its purpose as consistent with and an integral part of the mission and goals of its host institution and identifies the distinctive nature and benefits for students, the institution and program partners, including a clear statement about who the program serves and what it seeks to accomplish with respect to student learning and development. The program's goals describe how its mission will be achieved. The program's mission and goals are developed with and recognized by institutional leadership and in consultation with program constituents. Mission and goals are used to guide the program's practices and policies and to evaluate effectiveness and are recorded, disseminated, implemented and regularly reviewed.

Guidance:

The program's mission defines the scope of the program, its values, and character. It is prepared after thoughtful consideration of its purpose and is periodically reviewed and updated. The views of program constituents, generally students, faculty, internal partners, employers, and the host institution are considered, and appropriate institutional authorities approve the mission. For example, program evaluation may occur during an institutional reaccreditation self-study.

Program goals describe the benefits constituents can expect as a result of participation. Goals should be stated as outcomes or competencies. Goals are expressed in observable terms so that achievement can be evaluated. From goals, measurable objectives are developed. Objectives are the activities that programs conduct to achieve a goal. This would include effective definitions and literature that match the standard and defined parameters.

A strong academic internship program is expected to demonstrate:

1.1   A mission and goals that are aligned with the institution's mission and goals.

1.2   A mission and goals that were developed through collaborative participation by key stakeholders as appropriate for student populations and community standards.

1.3   A mission and goals that are clearly defined, reference student learning and development, and are used to guide program activities that engage students in planned, educationally-related work and learning experiences.

1.4   A mission and goals that is publicized to constituents and available to potential participants.

1.5   A mission and goals that are periodically evaluated by stakeholders and approved by the host institution.

The institution has effectively included academic internships as in integral part of the academic program and has implemented policies and practices appropriate to the achievement of program mission and goals. Strong institutional relationships help to determine program quality, protect the student, protect the faculty or staff member, protect the institution, and protect the employer/site sponsor.

Guidance:

Effective academic internship programs are integrated into the academic and administrative life of the host institution. Program integration, stability and institutionalization are processes that can take decades to fully establish. All successful and sustainable academic internship programs have attained substantial progress in these areas. Success may be demonstrated through academic and administrative policies and practices; partnerships and collaboration with faculty and other departments, sufficient staffing and funding; ethical standards that govern program activities; and a process for program evaluation.

A strong academic internship program is expected to demonstrate:

2.1   How effectively the program is integrated into the academic and administrative culture, policy, and practices of the institution through collaboration with colleagues and departments to promote student learning, development, persistence and success.

2.2   How the program ensures that the academic nature of the program is maintained through activities including the awarding of academic credit for a wide range of experiences that are appropriate for students at various developmental levels and that is based primarily upon learning not just upon hours accrued at the site.

2.3   How the program effectively places faculty in a role of program support, endorsement, development, and evaluation and includes a syllabus or plan that describes the purpose and outcomes, assignments and course requirements, and the roles and responsibilities of all parties.

2.4   How the program has facilities and equipment, finances, staffing, and administrative processes that are sufficient to achieve program mission and goals.

2.5   Funding priorities are established based upon need and demonstrate responsible stewardship consistent with institutional protocols.

2.6   How the program has degreed, credentialed and qualified professionals to lead the program and to carry out program goals including strategic planning, supervision, management, assessment, communication, advocacy and data-based decision making.

2.7   How these professionals keep abreast of the research, theories, legislation, policies and development that affect the program.

2.8   How ethical standards that all professionals understand govern behavior of all program participants and how those are established, communicated, and periodically reviewed.

2.9   How processes are used to periodically evaluate institutional relationships and to ensure that the program are welcoming, accessible and inclusive to persons of diverse backgrounds, are equitable and non discriminatory and free of harassment.

STANDARD THREE: Employers and Community Partners

The program effectively selects, prepares, engages and monitors employers so that students achieve learning outcomes consistent with program goals. In addition, employers are included in periodic reviews of program effectiveness. Institutions, their employers and community partners embrace diversity, respect differences and eliminate barriers that impede student learning as demonstrated through their ongoing relationships.

Guidance:

An essential element of effective academic internship programs is employers and community partners who provide high quality work-site experiences to students. Qualifying employers prior to the start of work assignments is essential to student safety and to determine employer willingness to support the learning goals of academic internships and to abide by program requirements. Employers hiring interns year after year, compensating them if possible, providing appropriate supervision, and intentionally assisting them to develop relevant knowledge and skills enhance program quality. Employers and community partners also have an important role in the supervision and evaluation of student performance and program effectiveness. Success may be demonstrated through documentation of the level of employer involvement and effective processes for communication between the program and employers throughout the academic internship experience, reflecting commitment and promoting collaboration and student learning. Some examples may be documentation of student employment and compensation, agreement forms, tracking of interactions with supervisors, active support for the completion of reflection assignments, and processes used to solve problems during the work term.

A strong academic internship program is expected to demonstrate:

3.1   A process that ensures that employment locations are appropriate working/learning environments and employers participate in the learning aspect of the program.

3.2   A process that ensures that academic internships are planned, professional and supervised.

3.3   A criteria for academic internship sites and a process that ensures participating employers and community partners support program goals.

3.4   Ethical standards that govern the conduct of employers and community partners which are in compliance with laws, regulations, and policies that relate to their respective responsibilities, clearly established, effectively communicated, and periodically reviewed.

3.5   A process that considers recommendations for improvement from employers and community partners in academic internship program evaluation.

STANDARD FOUR: Student Learning Environment

The program demonstrates that it provides an environment at employer locations that supports the achievement of student learning outcomes. In addition, programs demonstrate that a student learning and development focused approach guides preparation, reflection, and monitoring activities. Educational programs and services exist in environments that provide students with appropriate levels of challenge and support. Institutions, employers and community partners provide opportunities for learning yet responsibility for learning rests with the student.

Guidance:

Effective academic internship programs provide a means for students to apply course content in real-world settings to enhance the educational process. Education occurs inside and outside the classroom where students can develop, through experience and reflection, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to succeed in their academic programs and upon graduation. This form of work experience provides a means for students to apply major/career-related information from the classroom as they are learning it. Criteria for program participation serves to assure that, students have the ability to succeed academically. Ethical standards guide what programs promise and are included in student preparation and expectations for student conduct. Program policies and characteristics consistently contribute to an intentional system aimed at producing student learning outcomes. Success may be demonstrated through productive partnerships with faculty and employers, work schedules that allow for sufficient time for learning to occur, academic documentation, sites that are focused on learning, appropriate supervision, completion of learning objectives and reflection assignments structured to enhance the development of defined learning competencies and methods to link learning from student work experience back into the classroom. Examples may include: program plans, academic policies and manuals, documentation of student participation; experience identified as part of the curriculum, such as on transcripts, curriculum requirements, and grades, job descriptions that reflect relatedness to student preparation, and syllabi focused on promoting learning outcomes.

A strong academic internship program is expected to demonstrate:

4.1   How effectively student participation criteria and policies support student learning outcomes and apply course content through its processes and procedures.

4.2   How work is structured and learning objectives are established to insure that major or career-related learning outcomes occur in real-world situations and promote student learning.

4.3   How student learning is supported in the structure of the curriculum and academic internship experience.

4.4   How ethical standards governing student behavior are established, communicated, and periodically reviewed.

4.5   That the academic internship program has a process in place to ensure that students are effectively prepared for participation prior to their academic internship.

4.6   That the academic internship program has a process in place to ensure that students reflect upon their learning and articulate their personal and professional development.

4.7   How the program demonstrates that the majority of students persist in fulfilling the minimum time requirement established in the program guidelines.

STANDARD FIVE: Outcomes Assessment / Program Effectiveness

The program demonstrates the effective use of a student learning assessment process for each work term. In addition, the program has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness and its impact on its constituencies. Changes resulting from assessment and evaluation activities are communicated broadly with stakeholders.

Guidance:

Effective academic internship programs assess that program curriculum, activities and processes are relevant and producing educational benefits. Evaluation methods and goals are consistent with the institutional environment and measure incremental and cumulative learning as they relate to personal, academic, work, and career competencies for students. All constituencies contribute to assessing overall program effectiveness and the impact of their participation on their respective entities. The effective use of assessment data toward institutional commitment and program improvement is a sign of the health of the program. Success can be demonstrated through surveys, assignments that provide documentation, measurable objectives, cumulative resumes or interviews, and examples of adjustments made in program or curriculum structure based on the analysis of assessment data to improve outcomes for all constituencies and to better align with institutional mission and goals.

A strong academic internship program is expected to demonstrate:

5.1   An evaluation process is in place for each academic internship experience through which student learning and development results are assessed, articulated and used for improvement.

5.2   Assessment results demonstrate learning outcomes for students are used to improve the student learning experience.

5.3   Assessment results are used to support institutional goals or to provide feedback into the classroom.

5.4   Changes resulting from assessment and evaluation are shared with stakeholders.

5.5   Assessment methodologies can include, but are not limited to, direct and indirect evaluation, qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and existing evidence from all constituents to determine to what extent intended outcomes are being met.

5.6   Assessment of the impact of participation is used to improve relationships and outcomes for all constituents.